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ABSTRACT

The theoretical framework for a center for infinity is based on four propositions: (1) Untapped human resources in educational leadership are infinite. (2) The dimensions of effective educational leadership approach infinity and, as a result, leadership development should be based on diagnostic specification of instruction. (3) A seemingly infinite number of instructional alternatives can be made available for educational leadership development and, as a result, diagnostic specification can be operationalized in terms of individualized self-improvement programs for educational leaders. (4) The positive outcomes of effective educational leadership, like effective teaching itself, can only be measured in terms of infinity. The system used at the center would consist of a diagnostic component administered in a simulated or actual work setting; a planning component that would present the learner with multiple alternatives for self-improvement; a reassessment cycle to determine the effectiveness of the previous self-improvement plan; a program assessment component that uses aggregate data from learner assessment and reassessment to give preservice and inservice program leaders feedback on the effectiveness of their programs; and a program improvement component that would provide formal assistance in program planning and development based on program assessment results. (Author/IRT)

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**A Call for the Creation of a
Center for Infinity**

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A Call for the Creation of a Center for Infinity

In an era of dwindling resources and mounting challenges to our educational institutions, perhaps it is time to reaffirm a proactive stand toward the development of educational leadership. Roles are changing, pressures for accountability are increasing, some of our finest educational leaders consider leaving the profession, others doggedly work to stem the tide in the face of mounting criticism. It is no time to take a defensive or reactive posture. Time is ripe to maximize leadership development efforts - efforts which can produce a corps of proactive educational leaders who are better prepared to meet the challenges of our time.¹

In the field of mathematics "infinity" refers to the concept of a quantity increasing without bound. It is such a view of the possibilities and opportunities in educational leadership development which might characterize a proactive posture toward leadership improvement in education. This point of view can be summarized in terms of the following propositions:

- Proposition 1: Untapped human resources in educational leadership are infinite in nature.
- Proposition 2: The dimensions of effective educational leadership approach infinity and as a result leadership development should be based on diagnostic specification of instruction.
- Proposition 3: A seemingly infinite number of instructional alternatives can be made available for educational leadership development and as a result diagnostic specification can be operationalized in terms of individualized self-improvement programs for educational leaders.
- Proposition 4: The positive outcomes of effective educational leadership, like effective teaching itself, can only be measured in terms of infinity.

The Proposed Center

The four propositions above might serve as the theoretical framework for such a Center. Let's consider the four propositions one by one as a way of articulating a rationale for such a center. The rationale answers at least three specific questions. (1) Who is served by the center? (2) How does the center lead to improved educational leadership development? (3) What are the anticipated positive outcomes of the center?

The first proposition estimates that untapped human resources for educational leadership are infinite in nature. The proposition addresses at least three types of human resources: preservice educational leaders who are considering careers in educational leadership; inservice educational leaders presently administering educational institutions; and those individuals presently conducting preservice and inservice instructional programs for educational leaders. Perhaps at this point a definition of terms is necessary in relation to the specification of human resources:

(1) Educational Leadership refers to all individuals preparing for careers and/or pursuing careers in educational administration, preschool through higher education.

(2) Preservice Educational Leaders are those individuals in the process of preparing for educational leadership careers or, perhaps, those who have educational leadership potential and are in the process of considering such a career pattern.

(3) Inservice Educational Leaders are practicing educational leaders who wish to improve themselves professionally - through programs which help to advance certification and through programs which result in understandings and skills leading to better practice.

(4) Preservice and Inservice Program Leaders refers to all individuals offering services and programs which provide preservice or inservice training experiences to educational leadership personnel. These individuals often represent universities and colleges, professional organizations, local school districts, consultant organizations, and certain government organizations.

The Center for Infinity would exist to serve the educational leadership personnel described above, particularly with respect to helping them develop untapped human resources in themselves and others. Training in educational administration involves the development of knowledge, values, and skills which must eventually be specified to practice in the field. The pedagogy involved with the preparation and development of improved educational leadership must necessarily take the view that in each learner, the potential for improvement is unlimited, for the perception or expectation of leader limitations only sets in motion a prophesy which benefits no one. Rather, in terms of the center, the expectation is always of a leader in the process of becoming, and of untapped human resources without limit.²

The second proposition suggests that the dimensions of effective educational leadership seem to approach infinity. During the initial year of a recent research project designed to verify and validate descriptors of public school principals' competencies, approximately 3,600 - 4,000 statements of roles, duties, functions, and responsibilities were identified by a variety of research and professional sources.³ These multiple perspectives of educational leadership were derived from the study of only one leadership role, how many more would have emerged if the search were extended to all educational leadership positions. This number might increase considerably if multiplied by the varying and often differing opinions about effective practice which emerge from time to time.

While it is important that the point is not overdone, it soon becomes apparent that the process of educational leadership development must necessarily deal with these multiple dimensions by continually focusing on individual diagnosis which identifies opportunities for individual development in terms of assessed strengths and weaknesses. Diagnosis is a way individualized leadership development plans can be established to address specific needs rather than all possible needs. Without the diagnostic component one is often left with an unenviable choice between providing development activities applicable to all dimensions of educational leadership or developing programs at so high a level of abstraction as to place their relevance to practice in question.

The third proposition refers to the seemingly infinite number of instructional alternatives both within education and outside of education which can be employed for educational leadership development. The question of which instructional alternative(s) are applicable to which individuals can be answered in terms of diagnosis of individual needs. Ideally, educational leaders should develop individualized self-improvement plans which address diagnosed individual needs. Thus, two components of the center are apparent: a leadership assessment mechanism for the purpose of leadership development and a leadership development planning mechanism through which individualized objectives for leadership improvement are developed based on diagnosed leader needs. In terms of the latter, training and instruction would not necessarily be a part of the mechanism. Rather, the leadership improvement mechanism would present the leader with development alternatives relevant to diagnosed needs and assist him in creating his/her own individualized leadership development plan. Many instructional alternatives already exist, the prime purpose of the center is not to create more alternatives, but rather to help educational

leaders identify opportunities for improvement and individualized means by which improvement can take place.

The fourth proposition presents the major theme of the center, "The positive outcomes of effective educational leadership, like effective teaching itself, can only be measured in terms of infinity." A lofty perspective, an unrealistic approach, perhaps, but let's indulge ourselves, let's take that proactive stance we were talking about, and dream a little. While the outcomes of improved educational leadership and improved educational practice are articulated quite well in terms of the goals and objectives of our educational institutions, they are indeed part of that infinity mentioned above. Instead of dwelling on these, let's consider four more specific outcomes relative to the educational leadership development center proposed in this proposal:

1. As a result of the Center for Infinity, there will be effective and efficient use of existing leadership development resources in education. In a time of scarce resources, cries for accountability, and demands for excellence in education, it becomes increasingly more important to employ existing resources to their best advantage as well as finding creative ways to employ these resources to meet new challenges to our educational institutions. It is becoming quite difficult to take the positions that new resources, more money, more people, more buildings, more materials will solve all of education's problems. Rather, there is a need in education to use scarce new resources in ways which will maximize the use of existing resources.

Over the past decade or two, our government and our educational institutions have poured a great deal of money into educational research, the development of innovative programs through Title III and later Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and through the support of preparation programs and

inservice programs offered by universities and other agencies. Some of the products are probably laying on shelves somewhere. Many outstanding programs are still in operation, but often serving too limited a clientele. Little is being done to capitalize on these resources. Yet the fact remains that they are resources for which we have already paid, resources we cannot afford to ignore, and resources we do not wish to reinvent and pay for twice.

The center provides diagnostic, data-based planning systems which allow a client to review an array of these instructional or training resources and decide which are relevant to his/her diagnosed needs. Once the learner accomplishes this, the learner can develop a plan by which specific weaknesses may be systematically upgraded and known strengths can be refined. In order to bring about this outcome, we need to note three components. First, there is a need for a comprehensive, job-related diagnostic system involving either on-the-job assessment for inservice clients and/or simulation assessment for pre-service clients to provide clients with a diagnostic profile from which they can plan individualized leadership development. Second, the Center would use a learning resources bank which comprehensively lists all leadership development opportunities (programs) available. A bank which a client can use to select development activities to address diagnosed needs. Third, a counseling mechanism is necessary to assist clients in the development of an individualized leadership development plan. Through the use of these three components, the Center uses existing resources to economically meet specified leader needs; and at the same time the Center would maximize the use of existing resources.

2. As a result of the Center for Infinity, educational leadership personnel will realize as yet untapped leadership potential. From the center's point of view, educational leadership is a resource to be developed. Again, by diagnosing specific job-related leader needs, assisting leaders in

identifying remedial or developmental opportunities which are relevant to these needs, and helping leaders develop individualized self-improvement plans, the Center would operationalize clearly defined means-ends relationships in the development of educational leaders.

It is important to note the systemic qualities of the process, particularly in terms of reassessment and diagnosis. For instance, let's assume a particular leader, an academic dean or a school principal, perhaps, avails him/herself of the services of the center. That is, the center assesses the leader and provides a diagnostic profile; and through the use of the learning resources bank and counseling services develops an individualized self-improvement plan. Subsequently, over a period of two years, the leader implements the plan through participation in specified training experiences and eventually wants feedback on his/her progress. This is where reassessment can be useful, possibly resulting in a revised or updated self-improvement plan and subsequent continuous improvement.

3. As a result of the Center for Infinity, a more clearly defined means-ends relationship will emerge relative to educational leadership development.

The central benefit of such a center for preservice and inservice program leaders is in the area of program planning and program evaluation. Reassessment probably has as profound an implication for the instructional programs employed by clients in executing their individualized leadership development plans as it does for the clients themselves. The data produced through reassessment not only evaluate client strengths and weaknesses, but at the same time evaluate whether or not the program employed by the client to correct diagnosed weakness was effective in doing so. Cumulative data from client assessments and reassessments could provide information to inservice and preservice program leaders relative to the effectiveness of their programs. If a particular program

exhibits a questionable success rate after use by many clients, modification of the program may be in order.

The center's main product, the individualized educational leadership development plan, is certainly the essence of what is meant by a clearly defined means-ends relationship in leadership development. The center provides a framework for selecting appropriate self improvement alternatives and specifying these alternatives to intended positive outcomes in terms of leadership behavior as well as a feedback mechanism for determining how effective those alternatives have been. One possible spin-off of client participation in the process of developing a systematic and individualized plan for self-improvement might be the improvement of his/her planning skills in general as well as his/her ability to help both students and professional staff in his/her own educational organization improve their instructional planning skills.

4. As a result of the Center for Infinity, educational leaders will improve educational institutions. In the final analysis, the improvement of educational leadership, if it is a desirable goal, must eventually manifest itself in improved educational organizations. There is a growing body of research suggesting a positive relationship between the performance of educational leaders and their organization's ability to produce meaningful outcomes.⁴ Educational leaders, like anyone else, probably tend to develop and support programs and policies which are congruent with their own personal experiences and convictions about how people learn. Not only might the center improve leaders and leadership, but the organizations they lead may someday begin to nurture diagnostic, individualized learning systems in meeting the needs of their professional staff and clients alike.

The Infinity System

The objective of the "infinity system" is to develop a clinical approach to educational leadership development, a learner-centered leadership development planning system based at least in part on the assessment center model in government and industry, and instructional systems theory. As noted above, the system would be applicable to three distinct groups of learners (1) pre-service educational leaders who are either in the process of considering a career in educational administration or are presently enrolled in specific preparation programs (2) inservice educational leaders who are presently practicing school or higher education administrators seeking to improve themselves professionally and (3) preservice and inservice program leaders who are offering leadership development experiences in universities and other settings and wish to receive feedback about the effectiveness of their programs.

To summarize, the system would consist of a diagnostic component administered in a simulated or actual work situation or setting; a planning component which would present the learner with multiple alternatives for self-improvement and assist him in selecting those which are applicable to needs identified during assessment; a reassessment cycle to determine the effectiveness of the previous self-improvement plan; a program assessment component which uses aggregate data from learner assessments and reassessments to give preservice and inservice program leaders feedback on the effectiveness of their programs; and a program improvement component which would provide formal assistance in program planning and development based on program assessment results.

In essence, the central outcome of the system would be the development of a unique partnership between learner and institution, a partnership characterized by mutual hypothesis testing, systematic "trial and error" program planning in

which learner progress is a function of meeting assessed learner needs, eliminating ineffective instructional alternatives, and replacing them with more plausible or effective alternatives. As an additional outcome of this experimentation, the system produces data by which hypotheses can be tested relative to program effectiveness and program modification.

The system requires a basic problem solving orientation in terms of components. It involves a needs assessment component, a component for problem delineation and planning, and a component to evaluate the effectiveness of tentative plans in terms of measurable outcomes. A simulation assessment component and an on-the-job assessment component serve the needs assessment function, an instructional planning component provides the problem delineation and planning function, and a component for the study of theory, training and practice serve the evaluation function. These components are summarized below:

1. A simulation assessment component based on learner participation in job-related simulations rated by trained observers produces a diagnostic profile for learners or perspective learners about their relative strengths and weaknesses. An on-the-job assessment component focusing on the performance of practicing educational administrators as rated by relevant reference groups in their organizations would produce additional diagnostic data.
2. An instructional planning component would provide an extensive cataloging of instructional alternatives specifically related to diagnosed learner needs as well as formal assistance in developing an individualized self-improvement plan. This component would serve both preservice and inservice learners who have undergone assessment or reassessment and have their diagnostic profiles in hand.
3. A quality control component for the study of the relationship between theory, training and practice would create an aggregated data base of individual assessments and reassessments to make decisions about program development in educational administration. These data not only evaluate learner strengths and weaknesses, but at the same time evaluate whether or not the program employed by the learner to correct diagnosed weaknesses was effective in doing so. A data base would be produced to encourage instructional program modification and increase our knowledge about how people learn to lead in education.

Assessment

The basis of this clinical approach to leadership development is assessment and diagnosis of learner needs. Assessment gives feedback to learners about their performance and their organization so that rational choices can be made about various learning alternatives. Since the purpose of assessment is for professional growth (not for evaluation in making personnel decisions, i.e., hire, fire, promote or demote), the learners themselves own their data and may or may not share it as they see fit. The product of assessment is an individualized diagnostic profile which graphically depicts learner strengths and weaknesses.

Typically, the data generated are representative of multiple and differential data sources, instrumentation and theoretical perspectives. In addition to simulation assessments and on-the-job assessment of organizational climate and leader performance variables as perceived by various reference groups in the educational organization, personal data about the learner's interests, abilities, learning styles, managerial styles, occupational preferences, personality inventories are possible on an optional basis. Relevant data sources include: self (the learner), subordinates or teaching faculty, organizational clients, community representatives or trained observers.

Figure 1 presents only one part of a sample diagnostic profile comparing a school principal's perception of school climate variables with teacher perceptions on an X-Y axis or grid. Each quadrant represents a specific interaction of principal-teacher perceptions. For instance, quadrant A represents those dimensions of school climate rated relatively positively by the principal, but relatively negatively by teachers. The numbers are symbols for climate dimensions such as "supervisory relationships," "educational effectiveness of

the school," or "opportunities for professional development." In this case, the teachers are dissatisfied with the state of supervisory relationships, the effectiveness of the school and its programs as well as opportunities for professional development in the school.⁵ The principal is positive about these and possibly unaware of the teachers' attitudes. This finding, combined with others, might be the basis for future leadership development activities for that principal. Further, if the principal had been working as a client of the Center for Infinity to improve supervisory relationships in his/her school, these data would suggest that the learning alternatives previously employed toward this end were not very successful and a modification in the principal's leadership development plan was in order. If these alternatives were not successful with many principals in different settings, the center staff would probably remove it from its catalogue system or at least advise potential users of its limitations as a learning alternative.

A System: Process and Products

While assessment systems and components as well as learning systems and components exist extensively in a contemporary sense, leadership training efforts need to consider the possibility of a systemic integration of the two (assessment and learning systems) as a way of producing continuous personal and professional development for learners. Such a model is presented below as Figure 2. Figure 3 presents a brief explanation of the symbols presented in Figure 2.

After studying Figures 2 and 3, let's follow an imaginary learner through the center's system of assessment and development proposed above. Upon arriving at the center, the learner would undergo intensive assessment activities (A) as an individual and as a member of a group of learners participating in simulations. Once this process is completed, a diagnostic profile (DP) is

provided based on the data produced in assessment. With the diagnostic profile in hand, the learner takes advantage of three key processes aimed at helping him/her develop a year-long (or three year long) personal/professional development plan based on the analysis of the diagnostic profile: counseling by center staff or peer counseling sessions (C), training sessions to assist the learner in developing the skills necessary for the construction of the plan and feedback mechanisms to be employed in the field (T), and resource identification through which each learner can consider multiple alternatives for meeting assessed needs to be addressed in the plan (RI). The learner has the flexibility to move from training, to counseling, to resource identification and back again during the planning process.

The complete plan (P) would probably include at least four components (1) an analysis of the diagnostic profile specifying needs, (2) alternatives and conditions specified to meet those needs, (3) a statement of expected outcomes of these alternatives, and (4) criteria by which the learner can assess the effectiveness of the plan. The plan may take the form of performance objectives or a contract between self and a significant other, or both. Over the time period specified in the plan, the learner takes advantage of the learning experiences (LE₁) specified at regular intervals the learner will collect work place data relevant to his/her progress and produce a feedback profile by which modifications may be made in the learning experiences employed (FP). Learning experiences continue until the end of the plan's term (LE₂). The learner returns for reassessment and data from the workplace becomes part of that process (A). Further, cumulative quality control data on the effectiveness of the selected learning alternatives is collected by which the center staff can evaluate resources proposed during the resource identification process (QCD).

The model places the responsibility for professional development directly within the learner. The infinity development system is constructed to facilitate a process whereby the learner becomes an active, self-initiating, participant in the learning process. If the medium is the message, one can only be hopeful about the consequences of such a medium for educational leaders and the educational institutions they guide.

Conclusion

The demand for effective leadership in education as well as in contemporary society at large seems insatiable. Challenges are often unique and complex, yet to a large extent we persist in preparing educational leaders in much the same way as we did their forefathers. Change is a way of life in our society, and the management of change in educational organizations seems to be a requisite for effective leadership, yet our leaders often are prepared in programs which experiment and change very little. Ironically, in the system presented in figure 2, the processes and the products are already available. In that model, it is the arrows (rather than the boxes and circles) that represent the challenge, namely reorganizing leadership development.⁶ We need to consider ways to systemically relate resources and knowledge we already have to create a true Center for Infinity. The parts or components of such a leadership development system are available, the challenge is obvious, and the potential rewards, as noted before, can only be measured as infinity.

Footnotes

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²The "process of becoming" is similar to M. Buber's and C. Roger's use of the phrase in "Transcription of Dialogue Held April 18, 1957, Ann Arbor, Michigan," unpublished manuscript.

³C. Ellett, D. Payne and M. Perkins, "The Relationship of Principals' Competencies and Meaningful School Outcome Measures: A Field Test of the Georgia Principals' Assessment System," CCBC Notebook, No. 3, Vol. 5, May, 1976.

⁴*Ibid*, as an example.

⁵This assessment profile is from an initial field test of an assessment and professional development program for school principals called Project ROME. The profile appears in the project's Field Manual, Valdosta State College, Valdosta, Georgia, 1976, p. 61.

⁶The author is indebted to Richard Snyder for his insight in noting the importance of arrows in the system diagram.

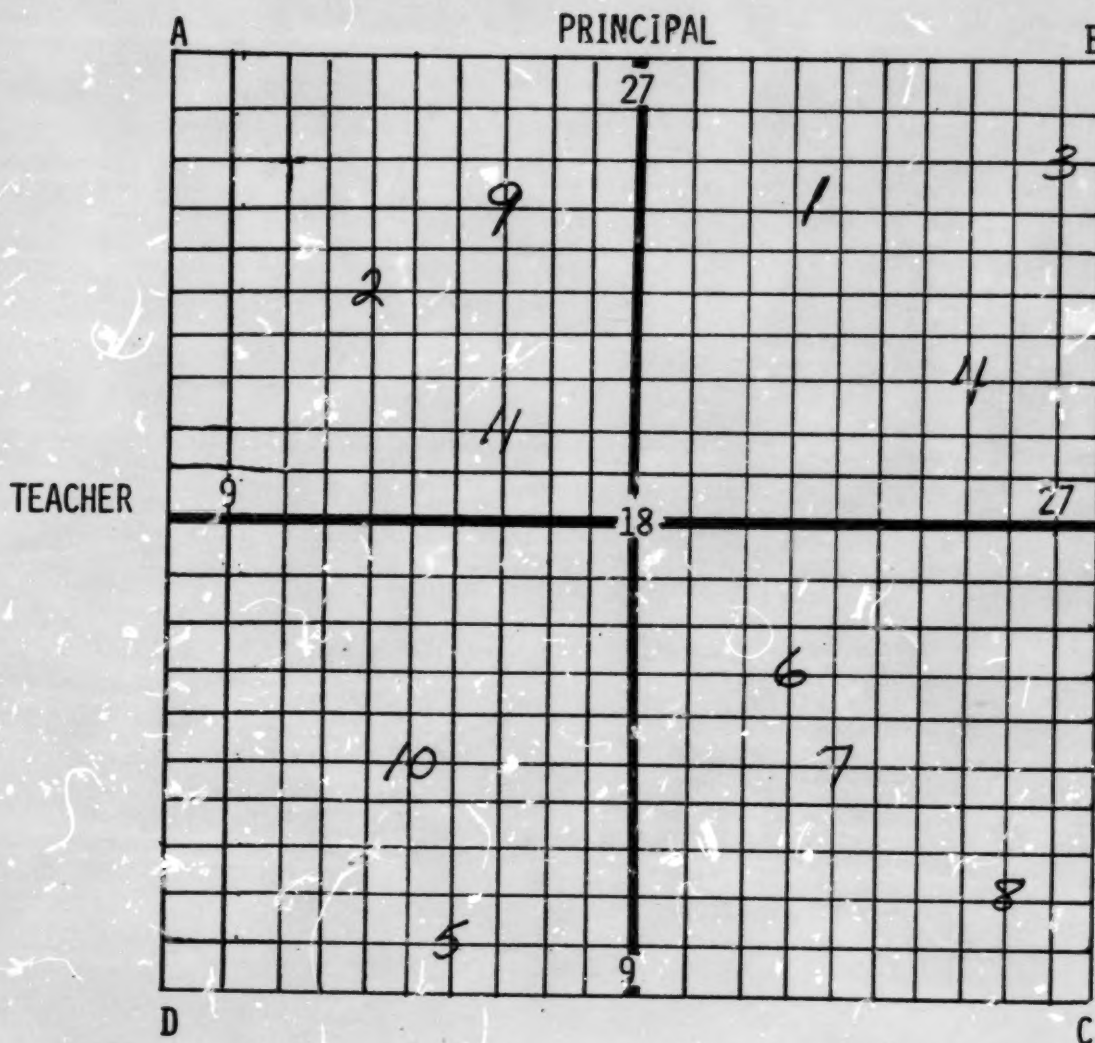


Figure 1. Sample Part of a Diagnostic Profile

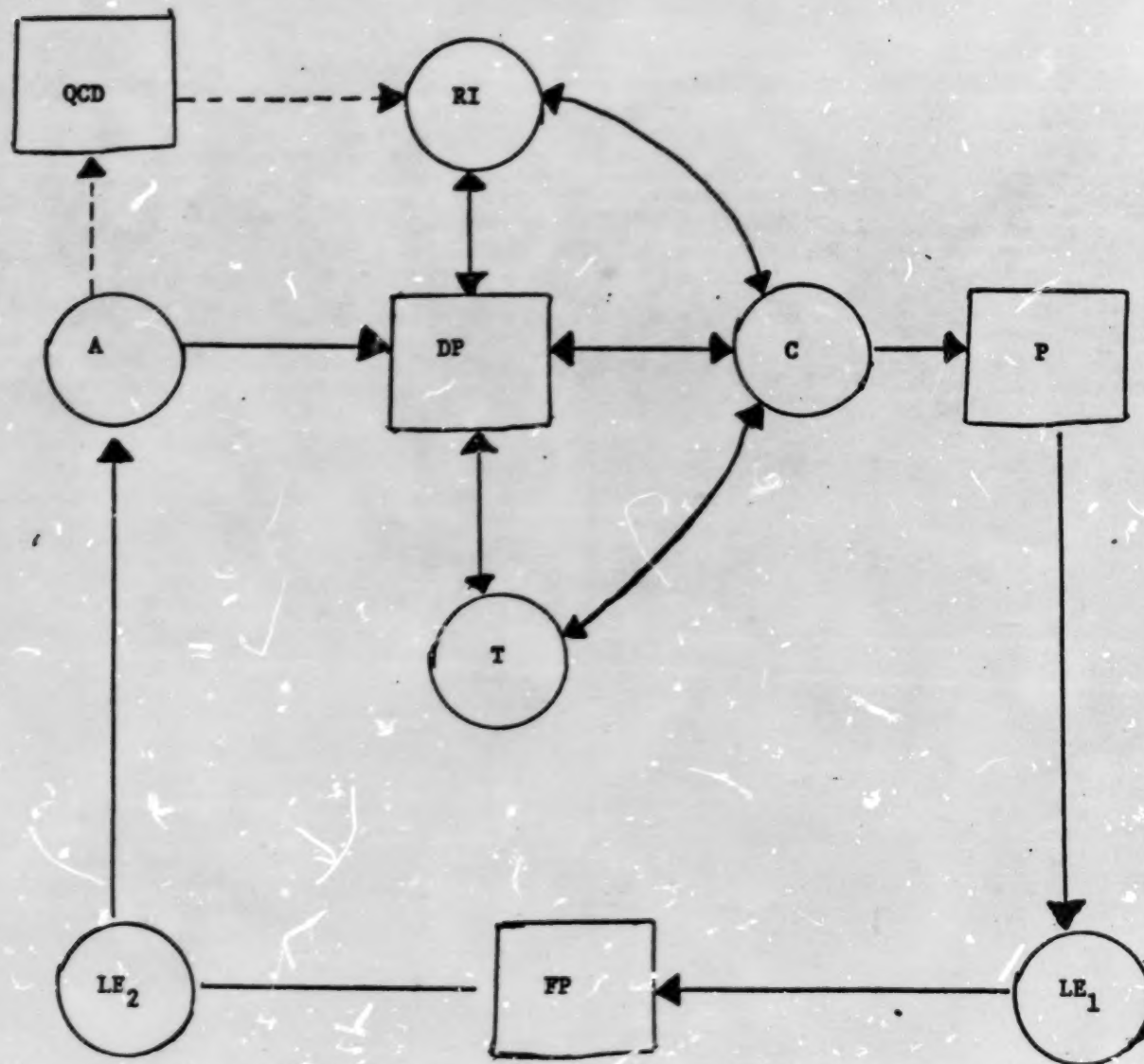


Figure 2: Process and Product Flow Chart for Learner Assessment and Development

<u>Key</u>		<u>Code</u>	
	= Process	A	= Assessment
	= Product	DP	= Diagnostic Profile
	= Relationship Between Process and Product for Learners	C	= Counseling
	= Relationship Between Process and Product for the Evaluation of Learning Alternatives	RI	= Resource Identification
	= Continuous Interaction Between Process and Product	T	= Training (Planning)
		QCD	= Quality Control Data
		LE	= Learning Experiences
		FP	= Feedback Profile
		P	= A Plan for Personal/ Professional Development

Figure 3: An Explanation of the Symbols Used in the Presentation of the System.